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FORMS AND VARIETIES
OF
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Massey H. Shepherd, Jr.

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**FORMS AND VARIETIES
OF
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP**

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I. THE RENEWAL OF WORSHIP

The concern today about the meaning and practice of worship engages all the Churches of Christendom, and assumes an increasingly prominent place in ecumenical discussion. Commonly known as the Liturgical Movement, this ferment of evaluation and experimentation in corporate worship is in essence a concern for an authentic Christian life within the Churches and an effective and relevant Christian witness to the world. The truth of any religion may always be examined by what it professes to believe—by its theology and its creeds. But it is bound to be tested and judged by the consistency with which its worship expresses its faith and influences the lives of its professed adherents.

The question of worship in our Churches is the more urgent, not only because our varied “ways of worship” and our several ideological interpretations of them serve as a fundamental obstacle to Christian understanding and unity. What, for example, is there in common between a Catholic Mass and a Pentecostal revival, between a Protestant preaching service and a Quaker meeting? Are all these expressions of Christian public worship equally legitimate and fruitful of Christian faith and living—since apparently one finds in every Christian body numberless “saints” who know, love, and obey God for Christ’s sake both implicitly and explicitly? If they are all valid means of Christian encounter with the living God as he is revealed in Christ—and there is no infallible proof that any of them is not—there must be some principle by which they can be brought into rapport one with another, so that they enrich and enhance one another rather than serve, as they so often do, as barriers of separation and prejudice among faithful Christian people. Thus the Liturgical Movement engages the Churches at the very heart of their inner religious life—the *sanctum* of the worship of God—with a challenge of ecumenical scope and dimension.

But the Liturgical Movement is just as concerned, if not more so, with the problem of the relevance of Christian worship to those who in our modern world find the accustomed language and habits of worship in our Churches progressively meaningless in the midst of the political, social, and technological revolutions of our times. How often one hears a Christian congregation sing words such as these:

All one Body we;
One in hope and doctrine,
One in charity!

However true these words may be theoretically, in actuality does the worship of our Churches make them really manifest? Does it say anything to a worker in a factory, where mechanization has robbed him of faith in his vocation? Does it give hope of friendship to the lonely apartment dweller among the depersonalized, “mass man” culture of our urban conglomerations? Does it speak acceptance to a “colored” man in our segregated neighborhoods, schools, and parishes? Above all, does it give promise that here in this place where Christians gather for worship, the tensions and conflicts of “cold war” among nations, races, and classes are transcended among those who know themselves truly members one of another in one holy Catholic Church throughout the world?

Whatever immediate relevance the Liturgical Movement has in the Churches today, it is certainly in its intense concern for true corporateness and community in worship—not that “togetherness” which is so often superficial and deceptive

in contrived experiments of group life, but rather that deeper sense of belonging and of interdependence that inheres in the very nature of membership in the one Body of Christ. It is what the New Testament calls *koinonia*, variously translated as "communion," "fellowship," or "sharing." The word describes both our intimate relationship with Christ and our common life one with another in him. Such community is brought into being not by human devisings but by divine grace. It is the work of God, reconciling men and women of all sorts and conditions both to himself and to one another by the love of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

If the Liturgical Movement is to make any significant contribution to this laudable purpose, it is necessary to rid ourselves of certain prevalent misunderstandings about its efforts and goals. The very word "liturgical" is suspect to many, for it conjures an image of worship that is overly archaic, formal, inflexible, and external. To them liturgical worship is legalistic, shutting out by some instrument of ecclesiastical devising that very freedom of the Spirit, "who blows where He lists," which is so much needed to bring Christian worship into sensitive rapport with the condition of human life today.

Others see in "liturgy" and overmuch concern with it not a renewal or renaissance of worship, but a retreat into the past, a looking backward for security and escape into old and tested ways. Efforts to recover or restore patterns of "classic rites"—whether ancient, medieval, or of Reformation times—are comparable to reintroducing into our modern life the artifacts and costumes laid up in our museums.

One must admit that there has been among certain enthusiasts of the Liturgical Movement an "archeological" element, a pedantic interest in searching for origins and precedents of the past. This has been true not only in the Churches which have preserved in their use a richly traditional, official liturgy, such as the Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Lutherans. It has also affected the so-called "free" Churches, who have sought in their own heritage to recover liturgical traditions that have—in America at least—been abandoned or obscured. The Presbyterians and Congregationalists now have recommended service books, inspired by the liturgies of the Reformation leaders; the Methodists are revising their discipline of worship with a closer view to the orders and forms adapted by the Wesleys from the Anglican Prayer Book.

It is only natural, however, that a concern for the meaning of worship should turn first of all to the original sources as a basis of education and reform. One must know what one's heritage is, if one is to make intelligent revision and innovation. The energy given to searching the origins and historical developments in Christians' worship is not designed to lay bare some formal pattern of "liturgy" to which all Churches must somehow be persuaded to adhere, or to impose some classic structure of worship of whatever period of origin. The aim is rather to discover those principles that make, and have made in all times, authentically Christian and effective expressions of worship "in sincerity and truth." The Liturgical Movement strives to make us, in the words of a familiar hymn, "live more nearly as we pray," so that we may face up to God's grace and judgment upon us in this world with intelligent responsibility and joyous hope.

In any case, every revival of worship must return for basic principles to the Scriptures. This is not an endeavor to find in the Bible any law or norm of worship which should be reconstructed in the Churches today. Much of the energy of controversy in the Reformation period revolved around this mistaken notion

that the worship of the New Testament Church—whether in free or prescribed forms or a combination of both types—could be and should be restored in the Church. That is certainly a way of making worship “archeological”! Rather the task of re-searching the Scriptures is necessary ground-work for uncovering what are the essential notes of the gospel which God wills to communicate to us in all our worship no less than in all our daily work. For in worship, whether in preaching or in sacrament, in praise or in prayer, God makes present to us and operates in us the redeeming work of Christ and the sanctifying gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The work of contemporary biblical theologians has been of inestimable importance to the Liturgical Movement. Not since the Reformation have scholars of all Christian communions, both Catholic and Protestant, been in such accord or approximated such agreement regarding the biblical teaching about worship—how God speaks to man and man to God, how Christ is made present in Word and Sacrament, and how the earthly Church shares and participates in the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the Cross and in his eternal intercession for us in the heavenly places. Only in the light of such themes can differences of forms and ceremonies and the relevance of this or that usage be properly judged and reformed.

Topics and Questions for Discussion

1. What would you say to the statement: It is not what a man professes that he believes, but the manner in which he worships, that is the true test of his religion?
2. Is one form of Christian worship as good as another, provided it produces saintly men and women? If not, why not?
3. Why does the worship of the Churches today make so little appeal to vast numbers of people?
4. Discuss the relative values of tradition and of contemporaneity in worship.
5. Every Church claims that its worship is conformable to the Scriptures. Are all of these Churches wrong about this claim, or only some of them?

II. CHRISTIAN WORSHIP—ORIGINS

When we speak of the “primitive Church,” we define a chronological period in Christian history; we do not pretend that Christianity was ever a “primitive religion” in the sense that we use the phrase for archaic and aboriginal societies. Christianity took its rise and developed in the context of a richly developed religion such as Judaism, and a complex and sophisticated culture such as that of the Greco-Roman world. The earliest Christian disciples were literate if not literary. They were accustomed to rituals that had been refined for many ages, and used theological terms that had a long history of development. The oldest extant Christian literature, the letters of Paul, written within a generation of Jesus’ ministry, must have been as intelligible to their first readers as they are to us. Yet who has ever comprehended sufficiently their full texture of meaning and insight?

Though it is obvious to say so, it cannot be too strongly emphasized that Christianity is continuous with Judaism, the religion of Jesus and of his first followers. Neither Christian worship nor Christian theology were spontaneous creations *de novo*; they were transformations and transfigurations of Jewish usages and concepts. If one needs to be convinced of this, he needs only to attend a service of worship in a Jewish synagogue, the pattern and content of which has not materially changed since the time of Jesus. He will not find the readings and

the songs and the prayers strange and incomprehensible, nor will he be unable to enter sympathetically and with conviction in participation. Of course, he will miss all reference to Jesus in praise and to his name in prayer. But he will not feel himself to be in an alien world and environment.

The point of all this is that Christian worship from the very beginning started out with a complex of form and substance that was already traditional and stylized. The Jewish Psalms were not only taken over into Christian worship, they have formed the model and inspiration of all later Christian hymnody. The prayers of the Old Testament, its narrative and prophetic forms, its style and vocabulary, are the prototypes of the New Testament. Indeed, in its formative years the only Scriptures the Church had was the Old Testament. The distinctive ceremonies used by Christians, especially in their sacramental rites—washing, anointing, laying on of hands, sharing in blessed bread and wine—are all derived from Jewish custom. Jesus did not invent Baptism and the Lord's Supper. He transformed existing Jewish rites. Certain of the most characteristic words of Christian worship—words that perhaps best define its spirit and savor, such as Amen, Hosannah, Hallelujah (or, in its Greek transliteration, Alleluia)—have persisted without necessity of translation from the Hebrew among all Christian churches.

The most common form of Jewish prayer was called a Benediction. It was not a benediction in the sense understood by many Christians, namely, a blessing pronounced over people or things. It was a blessing of God, an act of praise and thanksgiving—a kind of doxology, such as one finds in the ancient Christian *Gloria in excelsis*:

We praise thee,
we bless thee,
we worship thee,
we give thanks to thee,
O Lord God, heavenly King,
God the Father Almighty.

A Jewish benediction opened with an ascription of praise to God, which was then given a more detailed definition by the recital of one or more of his mighty acts in creation or in his providential and redeeming care of his people. Sometimes a petition, an intercession, or a confession of sin followed, and the benediction was concluded by another doxology, such as that which concludes the Lord's Prayer: "thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever." The Amen was a final response of affirmation and expectation, meaning "So be it!"

Jesus used the traditional benedictions at the Last Supper, when he gave thanks over the bread and the cup. St. Paul refers to the same type of prayer in his phrase "the cup of blessing which we bless" (I Cor. 10:16), and in his directive about the "giving of thanks" with its Amen response (I Cor. 14:16). The early Christian name given to the Lord's Supper was *Eucharist*, a Greek word meaning Thanksgiving, for this described the principal prayer of the service, the giving of thanks over the elements of bread and wine—what many Christians today call the Consecration Prayer. The Jew considered that any person or thing was made "sacred" by offering God thanks (cf. Romans 14:6); so the bread and wine were hallowed, consecrated by the recital of a prayer of thanksgiving. And this thanksgiving was also a "memorial," since it contained recital of the wondrous works of God for man's salvation, which he wrought in Christ. Thus the oldest "Eucharistic" prayers of the ancient Church that have come down to us, though composed in Greek, show an unmistakable descent from the Jewish benediction form:

We thank thee, holy Father, for thy holy Name,
which thou hast made to dwell in our hearts;
and for the knowledge and faith and immortality,
which thou hast made known unto us through Jesus thy Servant.
To thee be glory for ever.

Remember thy Church, to deliver it from all evil
and to perfect it in thy love; and to gather it together
from the four winds, sanctified, into thy kingdom
that thou hast prepared for it.

For thine is the power and the glory for ever.

There was, of course, a freshness and spontaneity about much of the song and prayer of the early Christians, often enthusiastic and highly individualistic in expression. For it was the worship of men who had found a new life, conscious of the presence and inspiration of the Spirit of the Lord—that Lord by whose death and resurrection they had been delivered from the power of sin, reconciled to God, and given sure promise of an eternal inheritance. The old familiar forms and patterns seemed to burst with the new joy of assurance. Much of it has the character of acclamation—whether in the short and fervent phrases: “Jesus is Lord,” “Come, Lord Jesus,” “Hosannah to the Son of David,” or in such exuberant doxologies as those scattered through the Book of Revelation, or in the rapturous Benediction that opens the first Epistle of Peter:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again
unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

What distinguished Christian worship from that of its Jewish parent was not so much its form, as it was a new dimension of experience. Judaism had a vivid remembrance, in thanksgiving, for *past* mercies—of the “mighty hand and outstretched arm” by which God had brought forth his people with signs and wonders from ancient bondage and captivity. It also had a sure expectation of *future* deliverance, grounded in prophetic promise no less than in historic precedent. Christianity added to this the dimension of *present* fulfillment. In Christ’s death God has brought about the final redemption of his people; in his resurrection he has manifested the first-fruits of the promised age to come. The Christian is “in Christ” in his worship as in all his life. The historic saving event is ever present in all its power of renewal; the future consummation is ever present in all its assurance of glory. For Christ in his death and in his triumph is ever present in the members of his Body.

“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matt. 18:20)

“Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” (Matt. 28:20)

Professor C. H. Dodd has expressed this threefold dimension of Christian worship in a perceptive application of it to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper:

Past, present, and future are indissolubly united in the sacrament. It may be regarded as a dramatization of the advent of the Lord, which is *at once* His remembered coming in humiliation, and His desired coming in glory, both realized in His true presence in the Sacrament. . . . At each Eucharist we are *there*—we are in the night in which He was betrayed, at Golgotha, before the empty tomb on Easter day, and in the upper room where He appeared; *and*

we are at the moment of His coming, with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trump. Sacramental communion is not a purely mystical experience, to which history, as embodied in the form and matter of the Sacrament, would be in the last resort irrelevant; it is bound up with a corporate memory of real events. History has been taken up into the suprahistorical, without ceasing to be history.¹

Topics and Questions for Discussion

1. List as many similarities as you can between Jewish and Christian worship.
2. Is the Old Testament a necessary ingredient in Christian worship?
3. Christianity has been said to be not the religion *of* Jesus, but a religion *about* Jesus. Discuss this viewpoint with reference to Christian worship.
4. What do we mean by prayer "in Christ's name" or "for Christ's sake"?
5. What does the word "remembrance" mean in the context of Christian worship?

III. CHRISTIAN WORSHIP—VARIETIES

The manifold forms of Christian public worship today, especially in the pluralistic situation in America, are confusing not only to non-believers, but to many Christians themselves. Take, for a simple example, the many ways Christians engage themselves to prayer. Some stand, others sit with bowed heads, others kneel. Some Christians close their eyes; others keep them open and fixed upon a focal symbol or a printed prayer book. Prayers are offered in corporate silence, or led by a single officiant, or recited in alternating or common responses. They may be said or sung, either in a stationary position or in a procession. In some congregations, the prayers are prescribed in an official service-book; in others, they are extemporaneous. Many of these varieties may be observed in the same church in a single service.

Yet they all have one common aim and purpose that make it possible to identify them as prayer: namely, an attention to the presence of God with intent to communicate with him in the name and spirit of Christ. A Christian visitor, even if he does not understand the language of the service, will not be at a loss to recognize that prayer is being offered, whatever may be the external manner of it.

But the differences are more complex, and may be occasion of intolerance. One can easily imagine three churches—standing in sight of one another—that exhibit on a particular Sunday such variant patterns as the following: One of them, replete with images and pictures, shows a congregation in bowed silence (or perhaps listening to a choir), while a priest stands before an elaborately ornamented altar saying an ancient ritual in honor of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus. Across the street, in a plain edifice devoid of symbolism except for a simple cross or open Bible on a wooden holy table, a black-gowned minister leads his people in carefully chosen lessons, hymns, and prayers, and preaches a prepared sermon on the text: "How much more shall the blood of Jesus purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Not far away, a third congregation, meeting in a bare hall, give themselves to an unplanned, unstructured devotion of "gospel singing" about the "wonder-working power in the precious Blood of the Lamb," while their preacher stirs them to emotional outbursts as he vividly portrays Christ crucified.

It is probable that none of these three congregations would admit that the other two are engaged in a fitting and proper form of Christian worship. They are not,

¹ C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1936), p. 94.

as we say, "in communion" with one another. Most of the worshippers in any one of these churches would feel uncomfortable in the service of the other two, and unable to enter with hearty sympathy into the spirit of their devotion. Yet they all worship the same God and acknowledge the same Saviour. They all believe that they are sinners who have been redeemed only and solely by "the precious Blood of the Lamb." They all have the same hope of eternal life in and through one and the same Lord Jesus Christ.

Our failures to enter sympathetically and responsively in one another's worship stem, of course, from a variety of factors, of differing degrees of importance. There is always the matter of our taste and temperament which are conditioned by our "psychological make-up" and our cultural education and experience. Some people lean to traditional ways of doing things, others prefer the freedom of immediate inspiration. Some people respond in imagination to elaborate and ornate ceremonial—and not only in church, but also in their home and social activities; others find it difficult to concentrate unless the external surroundings are simple and austere. There are those who dislike much music in worship, because, as they say, they cannot "carry a tune." An Orthodox or Catholic Christian stands silently before an image of his Redeemer, makes the sign of the cross, and lights a candle. Does this make him an idolater? To pray with sincerity and truth, does he have to shut out all external symbols and make up his own form of words as the Spirit prompts him? There have been arguments among Christians about the relative merits of "fixed" and "free" prayers. How then does one use the Lord's Prayer—as a form or as a model?

Much of our prejudice is due to ignorance. To understand fully the rich variety of Christian worship and the factors that have brought its manifold forms into being through the long course of Church history would require a laborious study of many volumes. But many of us do not even make the attempt to expose ourselves in any kind of living experience with traditions of worship other than our own. It is well to recall how in the second and third centuries many pagans, who were otherwise well educated, held the most scandalous notions about Christian worship, which of necessity had to be carried on in that age with cautious secrecy. Christians had no cult images, they ate and drank "the body and blood" of one Jesus, they held "love feasts" as brothers and sisters in the faith. Hence, said the gossipers, Christians must be atheists, cannibals, and sexual perverts! So today, one may hear utterly false accusations made by both Protestants and Roman Catholics about each other's worship by those who have made no serious effort to know first-hand what they are talking about.

The differences in the worship of the Christian Churches are, of course, due in large measure to prevailing cultural forces that have operated in varying degrees of impact at different periods of history. If we account the worship of the early Christians to be simple and unadorned, in contrast to the splendor of pagan cults, we must remember that the Christians were restrained by the necessities of avoiding notice of the police and hostile populace, and limited to the confines of hospitality in private houses. After Constantine, when the Church became the object of imperial favor and benefaction, its worship quickly blossomed with artistic surroundings, rhetorical formularies, and intricate ceremonial. No one questioned the importance of making the worship of the "King of Kings" as impressive and awesome as the accepted manners and style that surrounded the court ceremonial of the august Roman Emperor himself. The liturgical art and worship of the Eastern Orthodox Churches bear for us today the heritage of a thousand years, when the Byzantine culture of Constantinople had no peer in all of Christendom.

Much of the spirit of late Roman imperial culture survives in the ceremonial of the Latin Catholic liturgy of the West, especially in the more elaborate papal and pontifical services and in the larger Benedictine monasteries. But the liturgy of the Roman Church did not become universal in the West until the time of Charlemagne, after great social and political changes had taken place in western Europe. The Latin rite had to be adapted to the education and discipline of the rude barbaric peoples and serve among them as a civilizing force. The feudal ceremonies and chivalric ideals of these peoples were taken over and given Christian expression, while liturgical art sought to elevate their sufferings and their hopes in realistic devotions to the Crucified and to his saints.

The variations in Protestant worship are not due entirely to the several convictions of the Reformers about what was or was not in agreement with the Scriptures. Where the reform movement was held in control by civil governments, the changes in worship tended in a more conservative direction. Contrarily, this political control provoked dissident groups whose opposition to the magistrates often included resistance to their religious settlements, including that of worship. Puritanism both in Britain and in America is a prime example of this dissidence. Another was the Methodist revival of the eighteenth century, which felt compelled to find outlets for its enthusiasm outside the conventional bounds of the established state Church of England.

In America, the freedom and openness of the frontier and its pressing need of evangelism have been powerful factors in shaping the patterns of worship even of some of the older Protestant traditions. This explains the evangelistic character of American Protestant worship in contrast to the more formal and liturgical worship of European Protestantism. Other cultural trends that should not be overlooked, in any study of the changing course of Christian patterns of worship, have been the Rationalism of the eighteenth and the Romanticism of the nineteenth centuries.

Even a little dose of history should convince us that Christian worship does not* and cannot remain static. With or without a Liturgical Movement, the worship of the Christian Churches today would be impelled to adjust and respond to new social and cultural situations, at the same time maintaining continuity with the past and preserving those elements of their heritage which have not lost their value or relevance. There are, however, three new factors in our contemporary situation that are of especial significance both to the Ecumenical Movement and to the Liturgical Movement that may well be decisive in any reconstruction of Christian worship in our generation. One is our greater sense of objectivity in the study of the history of religion and of religious forms, our keener awareness of the cultural conditioning of religious formularies and usages. This makes us less apologetic and less polemic about our chosen habits and differences. Another factor is the larger freedom that all Christian Churches enjoy today from state interference and control. (We are not thinking here of persecution, so much as of regulation by the civil or secular society.) No one has to conform to the Church; and the Church is free to develop its own life. The secularization of our society has at least given the Church the advantage of "being the Church," and not simply serving as the religious department of a nominally religious society. Finally, the development of truly indigenous Churches in lands of a non-western culture opens new dimensions to the universality of the gospel's claim that in Christ there is no East or West, North or South. The Church does not exist to preserve, much less to save a particular civilization, but "to gather together in one the children of God that are scattered abroad."

Topics and Questions for Discussion

1. Make a list of the different Christian Churches in whose worship you have participated. Then note your reactions to these different forms, and analyse the reasons for your reactions.
2. Are the differences among Christians in their worship chiefly due to differences in doctrine?
3. List some examples of the historical and cultural conditioning of forms of worship familiar to you in your own Church.
4. Do ancient and historic forms have continuing value in the worship of the Church today? If so, give some examples.
5. What kind of changes in the worship of your Church do you consider that modern times and conditions demand?

IV. BASIC FORMS OF WORSHIP

In no instance is man's difference and uniqueness, in contrast to all other creatures of God, more manifest than in his capacities for communication by visible and audible signs. Man can not only indicate his present and immediate desires and needs, as do the animals, but he can evoke a rich store of memories and hopes. He builds monuments and leaves testaments that future generations can decipher, understand and appreciate. He projects schemes and plans to be fulfilled, whether by himself or by others. His means of communication are not limited to expressing his physical appetites and feelings. They convey abstract concepts, intellectual ideas, and spiritual values. Even the same postures, the same tones can communicate a variety of meanings, depending upon the contexts and relationships with other symbols with which they are expressed.

Worship is always communication. Hence it always involves what philosophers call "symbolization." It evokes memories and values, instills insights and perspectives, changes attitudes and feelings, excites resolutions and promises. Worship brings the whole of a man into meaningful response.

Communication in worship is not confined to the immediately present members of a worshipping assembly. It brings into play the whole "communion of saints." Past generations, "the company of heaven," participate with us in worship in no less real, even if unseen and inaudible ways, for we are the heirs of their prayers and of their experiences. Christians may differ theologically as to whether it is proper to address the saints in prayer or to offer prayer for the departed in Christ; but none would deny that the saints and the faithful departed pray with us and for us.

But worship, if it deserves the name worship at all, is above all else a communication to men from God and of men with God. Whether offered silently or vocally, worship is conversation with God, both a listening and a speaking. God uses man's capacity to symbolize as a means of revealing himself. As we say, God "speaks" to man in worship and communicates to man his "Word." Of course, we do not imagine that God has a brain and vocal organs and a mouth like man's, or that he employs some kind of heavenly language that can be translated, like a human language, with the help of a dictionary and grammar. Yet his Word is real, compelling and comforting. How many ways the Scriptures testify to this Word!

"Thus saith the Lord!"

"He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast."

"So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth:

it shall not return unto me void,

but it shall accomplish that which I please."

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,

and the Word was God. . . .

And the Word was made flesh."

Most of our prayers and praises (though not all of them) are formulated in words, even in our silent devotions. But words are not our only means of communication. We also use non-verbal signs and symbols. A facial expression often communicates more meaning than the word out of our mouth. A kiss says more to a beloved one than any number of repeated "I love you" 's. Think of the many meanings of a handclasp—joy in meeting, forgiveness of an offense, seal of a promise, welcome of a stranger, thanks for a kindness.

The most universal of Christian signs is the Cross—symbol at once of all that God's love for us in Christ means. It is a sign to us both of our sin and of our salvation. As Sir Thomas Browne, author of the classic *Religio Medici*, put it: "At the sight of a Cross or Crucifix I can dispense with my hat, but scarce with the thought or memory of my Saviour." The Cross is the principal, inescapable symbol set up in our churches; it may be, on their exterior, the one thing that at once identifies the building as a Christian church. Many Christians make "the sign of the cross" as an act of prayer or of confession, of dedication or of blessing. We all sing of the Cross, and in so doing sing about Christ and his atonement for our sins. However employed, the symbol carries a wealth of meaning, instantly and effectively, without need of our spelling it all out in words.

For the purpose of analysis, students of worship have often used a classification—derived from the pagan mystery cults of the Greco-Roman world—the threefold scheme of "things seen," "things heard," and "things done." For convenience we might call them the visual, the audible, and the dramatic signs or symbols of worship.

Visual symbols obviously include the furnishings and utensils needed for carrying out worship—altars or tables, fonts, pulpits and lecterns, the *cathedra* (the chair of a bishop or authoritative teacher), and the vessels for the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Other visual symbols may be utilitarian in so far as they have value as instruments of teaching and stimulus to imagination; but in their non-utilitarian purpose of evoking reverence they have at times or in certain specific cases been controversial. Such symbols would be pictures and images, vestments and incense. Painted icons to the Eastern Christians are "sacred" and partake of the nature of the sacramental. They are in no sense idols, any more than a gilt-edged, be-ribboned, and leather-bound Bible is an idol to devout Protestants.

Audible symbols are the "ritual" words—hymns and prayers, lessons and recitals, acclamations and blessings, meditations and sermons. They are the word-symbols. But music is also in this category, for it has always played a large part in Christian worship. Music enables us to enhance the feeling with which we express words. Purely instrumental music, however, and notably that of the organ, is peculiar to the use of western Churches only, whether Catholic or Protestant.

Dramatic symbols are the ceremonies. All sacramental worship involves dramatic acts, such as washing (Baptism), eating (Eucharist), anointing (Chrism and Unction), laying on of hands (Confirmation and Ordination). Processions are a common form. Included in this category would also be all gestures and postures and movements of the body or of its several parts.

All Christian Churches make much use of the audible symbols, but Eastern and Catholic worship is much richer than Protestant worship in the use of visual and dramatic symbols. However, the worship of revivalist and Pentecostal groups can be intensely dramatic. Protestant Churches of a "Puritan" tradition perhaps place overmuch stress on the audible or verbal symbols at the expense of the others, thus giving their worship an intellectual cast, with emphasis upon "understanding" by the people. The Quakers achieve an intensity of feeling with a barest minimum of signs: a plain meeting house, a posture of sitting, and silence.

The chief difficulty with the classification just outlined is that it tempts one to assess worship too much in terms of the externals, and externals which may be largely indebted to the manners of a culture. For example, acts of reverence found in different Christian Churches—prostrations, genuflections, profound bows, bows of the head—are the deposits of courtly manners in various times and cultures. In so far as they are intended to express reverence, courtesy, and humility before him who is our Superior, they all mean the same thing.

A basic differentiation of worship, used by theologians, is the twofold one of Word and Sacrament. In services of the Word (derived ultimately by the Church from the Jewish synagogue) the central focus is the reading of Scripture and preaching, these being surrounded and supported by other verbal acts such as hymns and prayers. Sacraments are "things done," though accompanied by words. They are corporate actions, involving gestures or the use of material things as signs instrumental of spiritual realities. All Christians believe that God offers his grace both in the reading and preaching of the Word and in the symbolic actions of the Sacraments. Thus it is a mistake to think of Word and Sacrament as in any way antithetical, or that either one is merely supplemental to the other. Both Word and Sacrament proclaim and set forth, in differing ways, the same gospel and communicate to us the grace of the same Christ.

One of the richer fruits of modern ecumenical discussion has been the increasing acceptance by theologians of all traditions of the complementary and mutually enhancing character of Word and Sacrament. In the ancient Church, the two were always associated in the one liturgy of every Sunday worship. Yet in Catholicism, worship tended to become Sacrament-centered, in Protestantism to become Word-centered—to the spiritual loss of both traditions. There is no basis for the notion that Word-worship is more spiritual, and Sacrament-worship is more material. In any case, man is a creature both spiritual and material in his being. His worship, if it is to be full and complete, must be the offering of his whole self—not his mind only, but also his heart, his "soul and body," one indivisible temple in which the Holy Spirit deigns to come and dwell and make his abode.

Topics and Questions for Discussion

1. List the symbols in the church where you worship, and note:
 - a) Which ones are essential; which ones are non-essential?
 - b) What is the purpose of the "non-essential" ones?
2. Is a commonly understood language necessary for Christians to experience unity in worship?
3. What difference does music make in worship?
4. How does God "speak" to us?
5. What do you mean by the "Word of God"?

V. TOWARDS AN ECUMENICAL WORSHIP

Living religions grow and extend their mission only as they succeed in adjusting to the inevitable social and cultural changes that make up the processes of history. The pace of adaptation will vary, of course, in differing times, areas, and circumstances. In a highly developed, homogeneous culture a new religious movement may penetrate very slowly, especially if it is resistant to the patterns of order and thought of its new environment. Indeed, if it is too hostile to these patterns, it may wither away, or survive at best in a kind of isolated ghetto. When, however, a society is in a state of rapid or revolutionary change, a new religion may capture a wide allegiance and itself become a potent factor in the remolding and shaping of its new historical frontier. Especially is this true if the new religion bears with it a more advanced culture than that of the society to which it comes in mission.

Christianity is certainly no exception to this principle of historic process. Its history exhibits notable examples of both success and failure in adapting itself to social and cultural conditions. In origin a Semitic religion, expressed in the Aramaic tongue spoken by Jesus and the first disciples, Christianity made its first and primary triumph in capturing the allegiance of the Greco-Roman culture of the whole Mediterranean world. This culture was a heterogeneous one, and by the latter part of the third century, one in process of deterioration. What survives of that culture, apart from academic literary and historical research, survives in the organization, theology, and worship of the Church. For it was this culture that Christianity brought with the gospel to the less culturally advanced peoples of northern and central Europe—the Celts, Germans, Scandinavians, and Slavs. And it was basically the same Greco-Roman culture in its Christian modification that the western hemisphere received from European colonists and emigrants.

Conversely, Christianity gained no strong foothold in ancient or medieval times in Asia and the Far East among the old, rich, and more stable cultures of Persia, India and China. Of the once extensive missionary effort of the Nestorians, only small pockets survive in Mesopotamia and India. Even Islam penetrated the area only by virtue of military conquest. Thus, to date, Christianity has remained predominantly the religion of western civilization, and its institutional structures, its creeds and theological systems, and its liturgies and forms of worship are best understood against the background of Hebrew religion, Greek philosophy and Roman law.

Today the prospects look very different. Western imperialism and modern technology have shattered the protective walls and the isolation of Asia and Africa, and in their wake Christianity has found a planting in these continents and their neighboring isles. It is small, to be sure, and in some ways precarious; but it has become within a few generations indigenous. And with the emergence of their new independent nations there has come concurrently the new national self-governing Churches of the non-western cultures and peoples. The eminent recorder of Christian missionary history, Professor Kenneth Scott Latourette, has pointed out how unique is this phenomenon, when one considers the relatively short span of Christianity within the total course of human history. Christianity, says he,

. . . has spread more widely than any other organized religious faith which mankind has known, and . . . never has it been propagated over so extensive an area or won adherents among so many different peoples as in the past century and a half. Even when full account has been taken of recent geographical losses and of widespread questioning of its claims in lands which have been

traditionally known as Christendom, the fact remains that in the past three or four generations Christianity has been more prominent in the total picture of the race's cultural life than ever before.²

The Archbishop of Canterbury on his return from the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held in New Delhi in the Fall of 1961, remarked: "From now on Christendom is going to be more able to present itself to the world as something which is as much Asiatic as European." This statement is more promise than reality; but it is promise with a fair hope of fulfillment.

It is well known that the current Ecumenical Movement throughout Christendom received its initial impulse from the problems created by the modern missionary expansion of Christianity. And it has gained its most spectacular successes, if not its largest fruits, to date in the newer Churches, such as the Church of South India. The questions are already inevitable: What new forms and patterns of Christian worship are likely to emerge from the movement towards Christian reunion? If there is to be an ecumenical Church, will there be an ecumenical form of Christian worship? What contributions will be made by the newer Churches of non-western cultural traditions?

It is too early, of course, to give any definitive answers to these questions. Recent revisions and experiments exhibit an eclectic tendency of borrowing — enrichments to worship from a wide range of Christian traditions, especially from the ancient and Reformation periods. The liturgy of the Church of South India, * already mentioned, is a notable fusion of Anglican and Reformed (Calvinistic) usages, with significant materials drawn from the ancient liturgies of the Eastern Churches—all performed in an artistic and ceremonial setting that is expressive of indigenous Indian style and custom. The 1958 *Service Book and Hymnal*, prepared by eight Lutheran bodies in the United States, provides a lovely example of adaptation of a litany from the Orthodox Liturgy of St. Chrysostom:

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace that is from above, and for the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the churches of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house, and for them that in faith, piety and fear of God offer here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

Help, save, pity, and defend us, O God, by thy grace.

Amen.

No one has suggested or urged the prospect of a uniform liturgy or worship for an ecumenical Church. Even the Roman Catholic Church today takes pride in the diverse Eastern and Western rituals which it embraces within its fold; and it has in the past decade made large concessions in the use of vernacular languages within its primary Latin rite. The worship of a future ecumenical Church will doubtless preserve the foundation structures of Christian worship through the ages—such as Baptism with water in the Name of the Trinity; the reading and preaching of God's Word from the Scriptures; the offering, and blessing by thanksgiving, and communion in the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist, with particular recalling

² *The First Five Centuries*, (New York: Harper & Bros., 1937), p. 6.

of the Lord's institution in the upper room on the night before he suffered; and the weekly worship of Sundays that recall the annual feast of Easter, with perhaps such other great festivals as Christmas, Epiphany, Palm Sunday and Holy Week, and Pentecost. We may expect new forms and ceremonies from the cultural traditions of Asia and Africa. On the other hand, we must recognize the general tendency to a common "world culture" that modern means of rapid communication and exchange are forging. The Church may well have ever richer and more diverse forms, but they will seem less strange and foreign.

What is of utmost importance, if there is to be the fullest degree of inter-communion among Christians, is the experience of "belonging," of being at home in any company or assembly of fellow Christians for worship in any place of the world. In an age when more and more people travel more and more frequently in ever greater distances, the need for this familiarity of belonging will be the more urgent. The patterns of worship do have to be recognizable, even though they need not be strictly uniform. Language barriers will have to be overcome; they could be serious obstacles in services of worship built too exclusively about the "Word." Sacramental patterns, simply because they are visual and dramatic no less than verbal, are more quickly grasped and entered into with full participation and understanding.

We must recognize that at the present time the diversities of Christians in their worship contribute to their continuing disunity in the separated jurisdictions of their several Churches. No mere human agency, no company of learned scholars in worship, no inter-church commission on liturgy can of its own power overcome this disunity by any external manipulation of rites and ceremonies. They can at best remove misunderstanding and prejudice and ignorance. It is possible for all of us even now, however, to recognize and accept with thanksgiving the deeper unity that is already ours in our one Lord and Saviour. We can humbly surrender ourselves to his will, and by the might of his Spirit ready ourselves to receive that unity which he alone can and does give, with faith in his promise that "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

Topics and Questions for Discussion

1. Are there any permanent and unalterable elements that belong to Christian worship at all times and in all places?
2. Analyse the worship of your own Church, and list with your reasons:
 - a) Those features that you consider essential.
 - b) Those features that you consider non-essential.
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages, respectively, of uniformity and of diversity in worship?
4. How serious are language differences in the experience of unity of worship among peoples of different cultures and tongues?
5. Are diversities in worship a cause or are they an effect of the disunity of Christians?

VI. RELIGION IS WORSHIP

Religion is always and everywhere an affair of worship. No thought, word, or deed of our human experience can be defined as religious unless its motive and expression exhibit the quality of worship. Conversely, any and every experience of man is pre-eminently religious when it is sustained by the attitude of worship. For worship is by definition the acknowledgment of God and homage offered to him as the source, support, and end of every value and experience that is worthwhile and good. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

Worship is our conscious response to the ever-present fact of God—to the wonder of his being, who embraces all things visible and invisible yet is contained by nothing. Worship is our response to the unceasing activity of God by which he sustains, directs, and overrules all creation according to his purpose—to the marvel of his freedom, which is perfect because it exercises itself only in love. Worship is our response to the relentless seeking of God for this very response of ours, which he wills for us to make only in the free obedience of love.

Whither shall I go from thy spirit?
or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there:
if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.
If I take the wings of the morning,
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;
Even there shall thy hand lead me,
and thy right hand shall hold me. (Psalm 139:7-10)

In any consideration of the meaning of worship, it is essential to bear in mind this broad and comprehensive horizon where the attitude of worship suffuses every dimension of the panorama of life. Worship is more than the formal words and postures of ritual and ceremony. God is glorified in joyous hymn and solemn chant, in fervent prayer and costly offering; but he is equally magnified in the humdrum and at times more difficult task of keeping his commandments. We have Jesus' unequivocal reply to the devout woman who shouted in acclamation of praise, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked!" "Yea rather," said he, "blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11:27-28). The late Archbishop William Temple related a parable that is often quoted as pertinent in this connection of worship with daily life:

The farmer who cares for his land and neglects his prayers is, as a farmer, co-operating with God; and the farmer who says his prayers but neglects his land is failing, as a farmer, to co-operate with God. It is a great mistake to suppose that God is only, or even chiefly, concerned with religion. But of course the truly Christian farmer cares for land and prayers alike.³

Granted the fundamental truth of these observations, the fact remains that the religious life is primarily sustained and developed by the more formal acts of devotion that have no ulterior purpose over and beyond the ends of these acts themselves. One does not worship God in order to be good. One worships God because of what God is in himself. One does not use God in worship; one simply enjoys his companionship. Goodness will of itself overflow from a worship

³ *The Hope of a New World*, (London: SCM Press, 1941), p. 70.

offered "in sincerity and truth." Worship is like the life of lovers who exchange, each with the other, words and acts of self-giving devotion that have no use other than the supreme use of nourishing and enhancing the relationship of love that exists between them. Yet it is these very words and gifts of affection, freely offered and without measurable price, that sweeten every necessary duty and service which they perform, and that heal with forgiving acceptance any injury or wrong which they may, willingly or unwillingly, inflict.

In actuality, it is not possible to conceive how religion can survive in the time span of an individual life, much less in the on-going group life of generations, without formal acts of worship—or, to use a more technical term, without cult. For purposes of analysis, students of religion often use a threefold scheme of cult, creed and code. But in using this scheme—and it is a useful one—it should be remembered that cult is primary. Creed and code, either separately or in combination, without cult do not make a religion, but at best only a philosophy. A man who says he believes in God but who never prays to him, either explicitly or implicitly, is not a religious person. His belief in God is only an intellectual opinion. In fact, he does not believe *in* God; rather he believes *that* there is a God in the same way that he believes other things to exist. Similarly, a man who says he lives by the Golden Rule may be, and doubtless is, a high-minded and noble humanitarian. But he is not religious unless he follows this code of behavior towards his neighbor for God's sake, or by virtue of a humble submission to God's authority as the source of this rule.

Whether cult can exist without creed and code is perhaps a hypothetical question. (The hypocrite is possibly the best evidence that it can so exist!) For even the most primitive forms of religion that we know—those in which cult appears to be little more than magic—involve some implicit beliefs about the nature of deity and its relation to man, and some behavioral patterns even if these are expressed only in the cultic act itself. The time-honored, traditional religions of the ancient Greco-Roman civilization were essentially cults—patterns of right ritual and ceremony. These cults were, of course, not without their myths and disciplines; but neither the myths nor the disciplines were shaped into a coherent system. Such intellectual and ethical integrity as they had was largely the work of philosophical speculation carried on outside the context of cultic practice itself; and many of the philosopher-theologians were indifferent, if not hostile to the cult. But the philosophers were not necessarily irreligious men, for they had their own ways of prayer and reverence for the gods. No Christian need despise the noble prayer of Cleanthes the Stoic to the "mythical" Zeus:

Most glorious of immortals, Zeus
The many-named, almighty evermore,
Nature's great Sovereign, ruling all by law—
Hail to thee! On thee 'tis meet and right
That mortals everywhere should call.
From thee was our begetting; ours alone
Of all that live and move upon the earth
The lot to bear God's likeness.
Thee will I ever chant, thy power praise!

Not only in the ancient pagan philosophers, but supremely in the pre-exilic Hebrew prophets, creed and code, theology and ethics, outstripped the development of the cult. Yet the insights of the prophets concerning the holiness and majesty, the righteousness and love of Yahweh would have been impossible without the tradition of the covenant relation established and sealed between Yahweh

and his chosen people on Sinai's mount. The whole prophetic remonstrance against the cult was aimed to purify and ennoble it, not to abolish it. Isaiah's lofty vision of the adoration that surrounds the throne of God, in which he received his absolution from guilt and his call to service, took place in the Temple and is described for us in terms replete with the imagery of the sanctuary. (Cf. Isaiah 6:1 ff.)

Formal worship, what we have been calling "cult," objectifies religious experience, giving it symbolic forms, whether verbal or dramatic or both, by which that experience can be continually actualized anew and communicated to succeeding generations. It may be as simple in form and expression as the famous Jesus-Prayer of Eastern Orthodox piety—"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner"—or as elaborate in text and symbolic splendor as the Divine Liturgies of St. Basil and of St. Chrysostom of the same East Christian tradition. And, speaking of the Eastern Churches, it may be well to remind ourselves that for centuries many of these Churches, under Turkish domination and oppression, survived chiefly by the continuance of their liturgical worship—as do their Russian Orthodox brethren today—without benefit of all the institutional organizations which so many Western Christians think to be essential to a living religion.

Jesus' creed was the Great Commandment—the *Shema* recited daily by devout Jews: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4 ff.). The code by which he lived was the "new commandment" that he gave to his disciples: "That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 13:34; 15:12). Both his creed and his code were given to his disciples in concrete cultic patterns: a prayer—"after this manner pray ye, Our Father" (Matt. 6:9-13); and a Supper—"This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24-25).

Topics and Questions for Discussion

1. Define worship; cult.
2. Why is worship necessary?
3. What is the difference between belief *in* God and belief *about* God?
4. What is the proper relation of cult to creed and code?
5. Did Jesus oppose cultic forms?

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